

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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SUBJ: TWO BRITISH PLANE SPOTTERS SENTENCED TO FOUR YEARS FOR
ESPIONAGE

1. SUMMARY. SENTENCING OF TWO YOUNG BRITONS TO FOUR YEARS IN
ESPIONAGE CHARGES THREATENS TO BECOME SERIOUS ISSUE IN U-
YUGOSLAV RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. BRITISH EMBASSY OFFICIALS HAVE GIVEN US BACKGROUND ON THE
SENTENCING DECEMBER 5 BY A MILITARY COURT IN SARAJEVO OF TWO
BRITISH SUBJECTS TO FOUR YEARS IMPRISONMENT FOR ESPIONAGE.
PAUL MASON AND ROBERT CURTIS, BOTH IN THE EARLY 20S. WERE ARRESTED
IN OCTOBER NEAR A MILITARY AIRBASE IN THE ACT OF OBSERVING
AIRCRAFT AND MAKING NOTES.

3. ACCORDING EMBASSY, BOTH ARE AVID PLANE SPOTTERS, AND BELONG
TO A SPOTTER CLUB IN THE UK. EMBASSY DENIES ANY INTELLIGENCE
CONNECTIONS ON PART OF PAIR, MAINTAINING THEY ARE SIMPLY
" AIRPLANE NUTS ".

4. SEVERAL ASPECTS OF CASE DISTURB BRITISH. (1) YUGOSLAVS
WAITED TEN DAYS TO NOTIFY BRITISH THAT THEY WERE HOLDING TWO
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MEN, ALTHOUGH YUGOSLAV-BRITISH CONSULAR AGREEMENT CALLS FOR

NOTIFICATION "WITHOUT DELAY". (2) PAIR COULD HAVE BEEN CHARGED UNDER SECTION OF LAW PROHIBITING COLLECTION OF MILITARY INFORMATION WHICH HAS MUCH LESSER PENALTIES, BUT YUGOSLAVS CHOSE TO APPLY ESPIONAGE STATUTE WITH PENALTIES OF 3-15 YEARS OR DEATH. (3) IN TRIAL (PART OF WHICH WAS OPEN, PART IN CAMERA) YUGOSLAVS ALLEGED THAT MASON AND CURTIS REPORTED FINDINGS TO PARENT ORGANIZATION (CLUB), WHICH WAS IN TURN CONNECTED WITH "INTELLIGENCE SERVICES". FIRST PART IS CONCEDED, BUT INTELLIGENCE CONNECTION ON PART CLUB IS DENIED AND ACCORDING BRITISH EMBASSY, PROSECUTION ONLY ALLEGED BUT OFFERED NO PROOF OF CONNECTION. (4) IN TRIAL FACT THAT SPOTTING WAS GOING ON DURING MIDDLE EAST WAR AND SOVIET OVERFLIGHTS WAS CITED IN SUPPORT OF ESPIONAGE CONTENTION, BUT DEFENSE WAS UNABLE TO ENTER INTO EVIDENCE FACT THAT YOUTH HAD DEPARTED UK FOR YUGOSLAVIA PRIOR TO OUTBREAK OF WAR.

5. APPEAL WILL BE BASED ON LACK OF PROOF INTELLIGENCE CONNECTION WITH FINAL POINT CITED ABOVE STRESSED AS CIRCUMSTANTIALLY SUPPORTING. HOWEVER, BRITISH EMBASSY IS NOT ENCOURAGED THAT APPEAL WILL RESULT IN SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE IN VERDICT. BECAUSE OF PUBLIC OUTCRY AND PRESS CAMPAIGN IN UK, EMBASSY SOURCE BELIEVES STRONG REPRESENTATION ON POLITICAL LEVEL INEVITABLE, WITH GUT ISSUE BEING THAT IF GOY INSISTS ON PUSHING ESPIONAGE ANGLE, THIS IS AN ACCUSATION AGAINST HMG AND GOES TO THE VERY HEART OF ANGLO-YUGOSLAV RELATIONS.

6. AS TO WHY THE YUGOSLAVS HAVE CHOSEN TO BE SO INSENSITIVE IN THIS CASE THIS WOULD SEEM TO BE ANOTHER INDICATION OF APPLICATION IN PRACTICE OF THE THEME CONSTANTLY REITERATED HERE OVER THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF OF THREAT FROM EXTERNAL ENEMIES, WHICH IN TURN IS CONNECTED WITH INTERNAL TIGHTENING IN SOME SECTORS. TOON

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